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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Anthony **Andanje** (Kenya)

V. Integrated global management/results of the work of the task forces and follow-up on their recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. At its 485th meeting on 10 September the Committee on Conferences considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences concerning integrated global management (A/62/161, paras. 5-11). The two-year project aimed at harmonizing the administrative policies, practices and procedures of conference services in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi had led to the adoption in 2006 of a compendium of administrative policies, practices and procedures. The compendium reflected the agreements reached by the task forces of the two-year project as well as those reached at the 2006 Coordination Meeting of Conference Managers, including, in particular, proactive document management and waiver management, as well as a common roster for outside contractors. The compendium had been made available to Member States for information purposes. A workshop of programme and information technology staff from all four duty stations in March 2007 had made progress on the three projects under the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management global information technology initiative (centrally hosted reporting database; more integrated meetings management system; standardization of documents management systems), which would run until 2009. The Department had been advised to evaluate the customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise content management (ECM) applications being introduced, with considerable delays, throughout the Secretariat, to determine their suitability for its meetings planning and servicing project and documents planning and processing project.

2. During the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, a client survey on conference services distributed to representatives of the Member States had collected data on the performance indicators identified in the strategic framework

for the 2006/07 period. While services had been rated excellent or good by 86 per cent, satisfactory by 13 per cent and poor by under 2 per cent of the respondents, the overall response rate, despite the availability of the survey in six languages, had been about 13 per cent. The Department had sought the advice of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on ways to improve the survey, which had been conducted every year since the fifty-ninth session. The Office had suggested changes to the survey form, but also other ways to increase feedback, particularly a central database to capture and analyse communications from committee chairpersons, Member States and other conference services clients. The informational meetings for Member States, which had begun in 2002, were now held in a number of duty stations, and attended by the chiefs of language services and by representatives of the Department of Public Information, which was responsible for the Organization's website and press releases. It had been suggested that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management should issue a brochure outlining its mandates, working methods and outputs, and that each permanent mission should have a focal point for translation and interpretation issues.

Discussion

3. Several delegations urged the Department not to lose sight of the goal of integrated global management, which was to improve efficiency and quality and to harmonize practices and procedures across the four duty stations. Any changes in working methods must take account of the uniqueness of the language services and respect the principles of equality of duty stations and official languages.

4. Responding to requests for clarification, representatives of the Secretariat said that the status of the compendium of administrative policies, practices and procedures was reflected in its name. It described the administrative aspects of the work of the Department as distinct from the mandates received from the General Assembly. The Department had made a conscious effort to ensure that the compendium was in line with legislative mandates by referring it to the Secretariat's Office of Legal Affairs. The fact that it would be updated in the future should not be taken to mean that it was a draft document awaiting finalization. It just reflected the fact that the process of harmonization was not finished. In addition, conditions evolved and that was why the compendium had to be seen as a work in progress.

5. The principles determining the division of labour among duty stations were not laid down in specific instructions, but instead determined by what was practical or by existing requirements such as the headquarters rule. With regard to collaboration on recruitment, the proposal for a common roster for outside contractors involved consolidating and rationalizing the currently independent lists of individual service providers maintained by each duty station. By contrast, companies providing services to the Department could not simply be placed on a roster, but must follow the Organization's usual procurement process, which involved competitive bidding. A distinction remained between outside contractors and freelance staff working off-site as an alternative to working in-house. The competitive examinations for new language staff were outdated in some respects, so the Department, working with the Office of Human Resources Management, was endeavouring to make them more flexible, while keeping all candidates on an equal footing.

6. The Assistant Secretary-General explained that the global information technology initiative could not progress properly if the large amounts of data existing in each duty station were not directly comparable and compatible. The common code structure needed for the proposed global reporting data warehouse was expected to advance further later in 2007. The Department would work with the Secretariat's Information Technology Services Division, which was represented on the Department's global information technology board, and the recently appointed Chief Information Technology Officer to ensure the compatibility of the Department's stand-alone documents and meeting management systems with the enterprise resource planning system proposed for the entire Organization.

7. Although representatives of the Secretariat had expressed disappointment at the continuing low rate of participation both in the surveys and in the informational meetings, several delegations were of the view that they remained a useful tool for providing feedback and facilitating dialogue. The Committee also welcomed the suggestion that feedback from Member States could also be channelled through the Department's newly-appointed Communications Officer.